Surviving Separation (You're Family, Will)

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Surviving Separation (You're Family, Will)

by stranded_labyrinth

Summary

A little over four years ago, Will's life had suddenly shot in a beautiful direction. Within a year, he was married and they'd adopted a daughter together.
Three years ago, he found out just how far his husband can go, beyond what he already knew.
Three years ago, he wanted a divorce.
Three years ago, his husband refused to sign such horrible papers.

Having moved back to Wolf Trap, Will has spent his time in almost complete solitude, save for the flowers that come every month and his daughter that visits the following weekend. As bitter and resentful as he is, not even Will can claim any sort of hatred towards the people he knew as his family, and they want nothing more than for Will to come home.

What's scarier, however, is that Hannibal seems to be carefully biding his time, his old tactics set aside for now.

[NOTE: Tags will update as the story progresses!]

Notes

hello :] this fic is based on this post of mine

Chapter 1

Awed silence filled the room, spreading through the air like a thick, sour mist.

Will wished that no one ever existed during these moments to bear witness to them. The last thing he needed was an audience during a time like this. He always knew it was coming, just never the exact time, or the exact location.

And there it was, glaring at him from where it sat on his desk in his lecture hall, far too big to ignore.

A basket of flowers.

Each one was white, with fiery pink insides. The arrangement was at least two feet wide, contained within a white basket with a pretty little pale blue bow. Tied to the bow was one very small tag, a thing that seemed to be glaring daggers into Will's very soul.

Dr. Graham.

Will scowled at it.

He was well aware of the sour look on his face, one that matched the air of the room (at least, in accordance with how he felt). This time, the tag only said his name. Other times it would be something far more dramatic. "Beloved", "Darling", " *Bellissimo* ".

All things *he* had lost the right to call him.

"Do you, uh…" a voice said behind him. "Do you think they got the wrong one?"

Will sneered at that, instantly increasing the tension in the room. *The wrong Dr. Graham* , Price was referring to.

“No,” Will said, his voice low and taut. “No, they did not.”

"Definitely not," Zeller pointed out unhelpfully. "Those are, uh…those are sweet williams. I don't think you give those to anyone *not* named–"

"Yes, we get it," Will interrupted.

The trio from the crime lab stood behind him, gawking at the display. He remained ever rigid, his displeasure written on every part of him.

My classroom , he thought. *My fucking* classroom *this time.*

“What I wouldn’t give to have someone to give me something like that,” Bev joked behind him, clearly attempting to lighten the mood.

Will wasn’t in the mood in the slightest.

He stepped forward, ripping the tag off of the basket and scooping it up, pushing it in her direction.

“Take it,” he said, as though it were an offer. His tone made it abundantly clear that it was anything but. “It’s just taking up space.”

If the three weren’t slack-jawed before, they definitely were now.

“Will,” she protested, “are you sure you don’t wanna–?”

“Just get it out of here,” he hissed, far too agitated than he’d ever intended to come off towards her.

He hated still having that edge to his demeanor, especially towards the people in his life that he actually enjoyed being around. Beverly was one of them. She’d been the first friend he made after everything went down, and the last thing he wanted was for one shitty interaction to cause him to lose that.

Even if ***he*** would probably love knowing that it happened, and that he caused it.

Fortunately, Beverly was far more patient than that, the social butterfly that she was.

Before he knew it, the three were out of the room, led out by a Bev who knew Will enough to know when he just needed some breathing room.

He finally released the breath he realized he’d been holding.

Every month was like this. Every month, on the twelfth, at some point in the day, he’d receive some gigantic display such as this. Usually at his home, occasionally in the office he never used. Usually it was flowers, ones that he knew Will loved. Or at least, ones Will *used* to love until he was receiving them monthly as a reminder of *him* .

Every month, right on the day that they first met.

He grabbed the papers on his desk, not caring if they crinkled as a result, and shoved them into his briefcase. He really wasn’t in the mood to be forced to ponder the past once again.

He'd barely been home for an hour when an all too familiar car began its slow pull into his driveway.

She exited her vehicle, the hounds all descending upon her at once, happy to see the girl that they loved so much return to them.

Will sighed from inside the house, rubbing at his face and disturbing his glasses in the process.

His day was about to get *far* worse, and he hated thinking that about her.

He opened the door as she finally began to approach. She noticed, smiling his way as though it was the most normal interaction in the world.

"Hey, dad," Abigail greeted.

He gave nothing more than a nod, allowing her to come in alongside the dogs before shutting the door once again.

Without much further conversation they were in his kitchen, him using an old Keurig to brew them both some coffee. She sat patiently at the table, drumming a rhythm onto its surface with her fingertips.

She seemed to look a bit older every time he saw her, which admittedly wasn't as frequently as he should. About once a month nowadays, and always because she drove to see him. He hated that he longed for it to be zero, if for nothing but to keep peace.

Just like her other father, her timing was always rather *convenient* .

Her hair was cut a bit shorter than before. She wore a light grey long-sleeved shirt with blue jeans, accompanied by a navy blue vest. Will's eye twitched. She must have truly thought he was stupid if she thought he couldn't see the blatant attempt to recreate his own taste.

Or perhaps she had gained it naturally. He wasn't sure which was worse.

The timing always threw him off, turned his thoughts as bitter as the coffee he'd brew for himself. He always remembered her preference, though, and made hers accordingly. No cream either, unlike her other father, but two spoonfuls of sugar, exactly like him.

It was the only time that sugar ever got used. Yet he kept it around, didn't he?

And then, apparently deciding that the peace wasn't what she wanted to keep between them, she opened her mouth.

"Did you get his flowers?"

He stopped stirring her coffee, throwing his head up in exasperation.

"Abigail."

"What?"

"Knock it off."

She blinked, almost looking offended. "I was just asking if–"

"Abigail, your habit of feigning innocence may have worked when you were seventeen, but you're not anymore, are you?"

All at once, she deflated. It sent an ache through his chest, but so did hearing from her person suit instead of her.

And then, much like himself, her disheartenment shifted into mild agitation.

“No,” she admitted. “No, I’m not.”

He finally approached the table, handing her the cup that had the sugar stirred in, sitting across from her with his own cup. They didn’t speak for another minute or so, before she finally piped up once more.

“You still have your glasses on.”

“I know.”

“You get pissed at my mask but keep yours on.”

He huffed then, taking off his glasses and putting them beside him on the table. He couldn’t exactly argue with her sentiment, nor did he exactly want to.

But now they were looking each other in the eye. Seeing into one another, reading true intentions.

“You shouldn’t be here,” he found himself saying.

“You don’t want me here?” she countered.

“That’s not–” He exhaled, rubbing a hand down his face. He also couldn’t argue with how he sounded. He hated how easily she could make herself difficult to argue with.

Just like her father.

“Your timing is always rather convenient,” he said at last, looking at her once again.

“Yeah, I know,” she replied, no longer attempting to hide anything. He appreciated it as much as it made his stomach turn.

“You always ask about the way I am with you,” Will began. “You always wonder why it’s not like before. And yet here you are, showing up on the same day he makes himself known. Tag-teaming.”

She swallowed, clearly not liking that response. “Have you ever considered,” she said back, “that the same day he has you think of us is the day I think of you? I get reminded of you just as much as you get reminded of us.”

The corner of Will’s mouth twitched, threatening to scowl. He refused to allow it to. “This isn’t about ‘us’, Abigail. You’re not in his game unless he wants you to be.”

Something flashed across her eyes, a visible byproduct of both fathers.

“When you started doubting him, and you started doubting yourself, you didn’t have to doubt *me* , too.”

The reply shot straight to his stomach, stabbing into his insides and twisting them around the blade. Even so, she wasn’t entirely correct.

“You two make a better team than you realize,” he said, ignoring that audible pain laced his words. “Your ability to *plot* together without so much as saying a word to each other is

unmatched, even by–" He swallowed. "Even by him and I."

She stared at him, her look not quite angry, not quite sad, but stern.

Determined.

"Then why not kick me out?" she asked at last. The challenge was in her eyes. A *dare* .

His jaw worked, tears at last beginning to prick in his eyes. The weight of these days always hung heavy on him, and Abigail always seemed to know the exact buttons to push.

Just. Like. Her father.

"Because…somehow, after everything, you're still very intent on being my daughter," he replied.

Her shoulders sagged slightly. Even so, she understood.

She was always the one coming to see him, staying a night or two before leaving once more. Spending that first meeting with them both holding the daggers of the past at each other's throats before she would try her best to put a balm over their wounds, allowing them some semblance of the peace that existed before.

She really was just like her father, and it scared the shit out of him.

And he had no one to blame but himself.

It was Will who made the choice to leave, leaving Abigail with her only influence being *him* . It was a flurry of different angles, different faces of the same shape, to look back on how

things were, and how everything made him feel. To see the gradual shift from when he first knew of her true position in his life. Her shift from complacency to action.

There were plenty of times he longed to go back, but he knew exactly what that would entail.

He would endure the pain of provocation as long as was necessary if it meant not living with *that* man.

But the reality was, if she had so chosen it, that if Abigail were to back off for good, Will would let her. He would let her remain with the father she's better suited with, let her have her bitterness towards him for not joining them.

Bitterness was all the Graham family had left.

He hated that they could still be called that.

For now, they sat with their coffee and their memories and their silence, soon to be broken when she would inevitably beckon him to act like a father once again, even just for the weekend.

And he would comply, just as he always did.

Will trudged into the building, bags under his eyes. He had hoped Abigail wouldn't notice, but of course, she had. She always did. And she always had to point them out, looking for some way to pass on her other father's advice.

And Will ignored her, as he always did when she'd start with that. They both knew why. She went on anyway, until he had to leave for work.

He was just setting up in his lecture hall, hoping to steady himself with familiarity. He knew this room, he knew his desk, and he knew the case he was presenting on.

And he knew the man entering the room.

Will looked up, Jack's eyes blocked out by the tops of the frames of his glasses. Abigail had let out a soft snort when she saw him picking them up to wear them to work. This was why, and she knew it.

"Dr. Graham," Jack greeted, smiling. "It's been a long time."

"Not that long," Will countered, his jaw setting. "Last time you came in here, you needed me on a case."

"Last time I came in here, you were just as quick to get to the point," Jack replied. He didn't seem annoyed with it at all, if anything he sounded relieved that he wouldn't have to face small talk before getting to the only thing he would care about in the following weeks: the case.

"What do you have for me?" Will asked.

"Several missing kids whose families are dropping like flies," Jack replied.

Will's brow furrowed, but he nodded anyway.

As far as Jack knew, Will didn't have a family. Some vague mentions of his father from years past, but that was about it. Will's home life hadn't interacted with his work at all, actually, so when it fractured, his work did not.

Until today.

"I would've contacted you over the phone," Jack said, "but there seemed to be a bit of a mix up. Turns out there's two Dr. Grahams in the area."

Will's jaw set.

God, can anyone *just shut up about it? Do they not think the joke has been made thousands of times already?*

"I'm well aware," Will said, just barely biting back a sour expression.

"Oh, good," Jack said, sounding genuinely pleased. "Because it turns out we could use you both."

Will froze.

He didn't look up. He didn't move or breathe, allowing the information to process, to swell in his mind before sinking rapidly to his gut. His nerves grew fuzzy in his insides.

"You want me to *work with* him?" Will spat, looking up at him at last with nothing short of a glare.

Jack, now thoroughly confused, blinked. "Well…ideally, yes. You'd both prove very valuable to this particular case. Is there a problem?"

"A problem?" Will repeated mockingly, his throat letting out a short, bitter laugh before he could prevent it. "Yes, I have a *problem* . I'm not working with my ex-husband."

It was Jack's turn to freeze, the situation at hand slowly catching up to his mind, the shock in his eyes fading into a brand of remorse.

"Separated."

Will's head jerked, his now wide eyes meeting the figure that loomed in the doorway of the lecture hall without him having noticed it enter at all. His heart hammered in his chest, anxiety spilling throughout his being like acidic bile.

"If you're going to air out our dirty laundry, Will," Hannibal said all too calmly, "I would prefer the information be accurate."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Will is officially stuck on a case with Hannibal, and he's not sure it can get any worse. Hannibal attempts to keep things civil.

In all of his time working alongside the FBI, Will had *never* had such an awkward car ride.

There was Jack in the driver's seat, visibly feeling the tension radiating off of the other two men. Then there was the matter of Will and Hannibal themselves, both of whom had assumed the other was going to take the passenger seat and grabbed a handle of the back seat. They briefly made eye contact over the roof of the car, waiting for the other's next move, before simultaneously deciding not to exacerbate the tension by leaving the other alone in the back seat.

Or perhaps it was just Will thinking all of that. He didn't know. For all he knew, Hannibal would be internally purring with content at Will being in a situation where he had to share a space with him. For Hannibal, bitterness and pleasure could intermingle in ways Will had never known possible before him.

What he *did* know, however, was that he was now sitting in the back seat with Hannibal, a rather measly empty middle seat between them. He also knew it was around his lunch break, and Jack had given them permission to eat in his car. He knew that Hannibal would never stoop to taking that offer, he would never dine in such an environment. He knew that Hannibal politely thanked Jack for the offer nonetheless, but only Will could detect the silent disgust at the suggestion.

He knew that he was currently munching on a room temperature toaster pastry, distinctly untoasted. Not that he cared much, he rarely toasted them to begin with since he ate them on the go.

And he knew that the person beside him was glancing at the toaster pastry, trying and failing not to grimace.

Jack wouldn't know that Hannibal was grimacing, because of course he wouldn't. Decades of training a mask to slide perfectly over his face had left Hannibal able to make the most scarcely perceptible shifts in expression and language that prevented almost the entirety of the human population from perceiving his thoughts and feelings.

Will was someone he had allowed beneath that mask. Technically, he still did. Will didn't care why, and he wasn't sure if it annoyed him more to have to see beneath it, or if it would annoy him to see the mask slip back on. Or maybe it was something that could never be reversed. Maybe Hannibal was trying to regardless. Who knew.

What Will *did* know, on top of everything else, was that he hated those little judgmental glances.

He swallowed his food down harshly.

"You don't need to concern yourself with what I eat. It's not your business anymore."

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Hannibal's gaze shift to his face. He didn't move to look, he really didn't care to see whatever look was there.

"...I did not need a reminder," Hannibal replied, his voice quieter than Will's had been.

Jack's hands shifted on the steering wheel, a visual and auditory cue of his discomfort. That was fine. Will would prefer not to say a word anyway.

In Will's experience, those who were happily married either responded the best to his situation, or they responded the worst. Some couldn't fathom why he would be in such a position, and were more than happy to try to force some degree of contact between the two, to make a happy family again. Will had just barely missed having to deal with seeing Hannibal's face before as a result of people like that. Jack, on the other hand, now seemed horrifically aware of his misstep, genuine regret showing in his eyes. Will was appreciative of that at least.

At last, Jack was pulling into the driveway, and Will had an excuse to get away from the air within the car that was thick with tension that would likely never be resolved.

They were entering the home nearly in a line, with Will at the front and Jack soon behind him, Hannibal tailing just behind Jack. He may be a man who supports his own status, but he was far from stupid. He knew when poking the bear would benefit him, when it would entertain him, and when it would be nothing but a dumb move causing a scene he did not want.

Will entered the dining room, his eyes resting on the family of positioned bodies that were being encircled with Beverly's camera. She looked up at him, giving him a nod in greeting that he returned.

And then the entourage entered.

Bev nodded to Jack, before seeing the newer face and standing more upright.

"Hey– Wait a second…Are you–? Dr. Graham?" she asked, smiling in her usual friendly way. For once, Will almost wished she would be a bitch to someone, if for nothing but to see Hannibal's tiny flickers of expression that only Will could read as his scowl.

Hannibal smiled back in his usual polite way, tight-lipped and elegant as it always was. As if appreciating her recognition instead of acknowledging her greeting.

Of course, that could just be Will's spiteful thinking.

Hannibal went to speak, the air shifting in the room as it always seemed to whenever he did. Will could feel it wrapping itself tightly around him, constricting his own breathing and leaving him forced to inhale nothing but the aura of *Hannibal* .

But no words came out, Hannibal's eyes honing in on one minor detail.

Will's breath nearly hitched when he realized what it was, and it took everything within him to prevent a devious little grin from showing itself.

Beverly had, of course, taken the flowers with her the day before. She wasn't one for much jewelry, but if she could manage to find something she liked, she would absolutely wear it. She seemed to have found just the thing. Around her neck, on a cheap chain perfect for homemade necklaces, was a Sweet William encased in resin.

Not picking up on the tension that, really, only two men in the room could sense, Beverly kept smiling and continued onward.

"Must get *real* confusing now, huh?" she joked. The words felt like they pricked at Will's very skin, leaving him itching with discomfort.

"There's always 'Dr. Lecter' for him, if you wanna make it easier," he quipped.

He didn't have to turn to Hannibal at all to feel the displeasure radiating off of him.

"I believe my legal name should suffice, seeing as you do not often have others refer to you as Dr. Graham unless they are near strangers," Hannibal said, his voice still infuriatingly calm, only an absolutely minute tension on 'legal name' betraying his frustration.

Maybe I should start , Will thought to himself.

"Wait– Jack, are you sure you should be bringing him to…this?" Price asked, gesturing to the scene while grimacing.

Hannibal turned his attention towards the man, seemingly grateful for the change in topic. "My previous career was as an emergency room trauma surgeon. As far as grisly scenes go, I

assure you, I have seen far worse. Your concern is, nonetheless, appreciated." Another polite smile.

Price smiled back, content with the response, and returned to his work.

Will, meanwhile, was inwardly rolling his eyes at the response. And the question itself, really. The concept of Hannibal being at all squeamish was almost *laughable* it was so ridiculous. Will had given up on the notion of Hannibal having any degree of sensitivity to blood and gore a long time ago.

Over four years ago, in fact, but who's counting?

"Will."

Will looked up finally, meeting Jack's eyes for the first time since they'd accidentally made eye contact in the rear view mirror. Will gave nothing but a short nod in response, then looked back to the crime scene.

Jack took a breath.

"Alright, everyone, clear out," his voice boomed throughout the room. Instantly, forensic workers dropped what they were doing to make their way to the exits.

Except for one person, who was decidedly not a forensic worker.

"I'm afraid that includes you, too, Dr. Graham," Jack said, clapping a hand on Hannibal's shoulder before moving to lead him out of the room.

Will's jaw worked as he just barely suppressed what would have been a rather obnoxious groan, instead managing to keep it at a sigh. He wondered what sort of conversations they

would have outside the room, considering Jack's apologetic aura at having placed a divorced– no, *"separated"* , Hannibal so kindly clarified– couple in the same vicinity.

Will couldn't help but feel slightly bad for the man. It's not as though he could blame Jack, it wasn't his fault. He had no way of knowing, seeing as Will never brought it up. They didn't work on cases frequently, it hadn't been frequent since–

He grimaced. He didn't want to think about that case. He didn't want to think about Garrett Jacob Hobbs, shooting him down, just barely managing to save Abigail's life, bringing her home, adopting her, becoming a family, finding out about that phone call through several misplaced words, the arguing, the admission to rummaging through his fucking case files, the admission to the call, the arguing, *the arguing,* ***the arguing*** –

His eyes snapped open, forcing him to realize that he had closed them to begin with.

The pendulum had swung without his permission, and just like before he'd even walked into the room, he was surrounded by family tension.

Jack and Hannibal had settled outside of the room, surrounded by various forensic workers who were discussing their findings.

"The family's kid goes missing, then apparently whoever took him decides to come back and finish off the rest of the family. Positions them all perfectly at the table. Still don't know why, which is where, uh…"

Hannibal tilted his head, giving an almost amused smile. "You don't have to hesitate to mention Will around me, Jack. I'm plenty aware of what he does on these cases."

Jack let out a soft breath of relief, nodding. “He’s our best shot at finding out why all this is going on.”

Hannibal, for the briefest moment, glanced at the floor, piecing together his thoughts. When his eyes met Jack’s once again, his polite smile was more strained.

“Perhaps that will be because of it hitting so close to home,” he said.

Jack hesitated, but eventually decided that curiosity outweighed his manners, besides the fact that Hannibal’s words had felt like permission enough.

“I’d heard about Abigail getting adopted, but I never knew exactly by who. It was you two, wasn’t it?” Jack asked, his tone free of the age old judgment he had passed onto the girl. “What was your family like?”

“It was only us three, unless you include Will’s pack of hounds,” Hannibal answers, his smile becoming more genuine at the mention of Will’s pack. “We were hardly the most traditional family, but we found joy in it.”

Jack nodded. “I admit, I’m trying to imagine how in the hell your parenting styles could mesh together,” he joked.

Hannibal gave a soft laugh at that. Truth be told, many people asked the same thing. The two outwardly seemed so different from one another that no one could picture what went on in their household.

Hannibal liked it that way.

“Once again, hardly traditional,” he answered. “Admittedly, I knew for quite some time when I was younger that motherhood would never be something I would embrace. However, given the opportunity to not be forced to endure its far less comfortable aspects, I’ve found it to be quite enjoyable.”

Jack looked rather confused, but eventually nodded, as though understanding. Hannibal imagined he didn't understand at all, but likely came to a conclusion that made the statement make sense. That, or he didn't want to be rude by asking for clarification.

Hannibal moved to clarify, but before he could speak, the man of the hour came back into the room, gloved fists balled at his sides as his eyes remained on the floor in discomfort.

"It wasn't whoever kidnapped the kid," Will said, his voice quiet and tense. "It was the kid."

"What?" Jack asked in mild shock, rising to meet his profiler.

"The kid," Will repeated. "He killed the mother last. She…she forgave him for it," Will said as though it could explain the situation better to Jack.

"You're sure it wasn't whoever took him?" Jack asked.

"I'm sure, Jack. But he…Whoever took him was watching," Will said, just barely seeming to meet Jack's eyes were it not for the frames of his glasses.

Jack nodded, the pieces of the puzzle beginning to click into place for him as well. "He was made to kill his family, then."

Will shook his head. " *Conditioned* to," he corrected. "He was more than happy to do it."

Jack sighed, nodding, before heading off to discuss things with the forensics team, some of them beginning to move back into the room they'd been ushered out of.

Will's eyes went to the floor again, or a wall, or anywhere that wasn't a person. He knew if he dared look at Hannibal, he'd get that same look he always received years ago.

And it was there. Hannibal was sat across from him, brows creased in worry in seeing the agitation that laced Will's entire body. He rose at last, taking two steps forward until he was close enough to Will for his liking.

Will just shook his head, brows furrowing tightly.

"Don't," he hissed quietly. "Just don't."

Shockingly enough, Hannibal complied. He didn't press, he didn't speak on Will's agitation. He did, however, remain standing in front of him, as though waiting for when Will would look at him.

And apparently, since he wasn't getting that, he would make it happen.

"Do you not find it ironic?" Hannibal said, his smile nearly audible.

Will's brow creased in confusion this time. "What?"

"Do you not find it ironic," Hannibal began to elaborate, "that the thing that brings us in proximity to one another again is a case of a broken family?"

Will's head snapped up, and his eyes seemed as though they were on fire when they looked into Hannibal's.

"Yeah, sure," Will snapped. "It *is* ironic that a case about a serial killer orphaning a kid to adopt them and have them kill is what brought us here together."

Hannibal was not a man who was often rendered speechless in any capacity. He could almost always have something to say, only allowing silence to linger for effect or when words were

simply unnecessary.

This was a time where he was rendered speechless.

This level of animosity was not something even he could predict from Will, and not only did it catch him off guard, it wrapped barbed wire around his insides and *yanked* .

“I’ll see you in the car, *Dr. Lecter* ,” Will hissed before turning sharply and heading outside.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will gets a call from Abigail. Hannibal is not too pleased with the outcome.

Abigail, in truth, had no idea why that man said what he said.

It was seemingly out of nowhere, seeing them walking together after exiting the hospital Abigail had been staying at. They were her guardians now, not just in the hospital's system, but everywhere. Legally, they were her guardians.

Her fathers.

One man, for some reason, didn't take too well to seeing them walking with her, hand in hand. There was peaceful silence, then suddenly there was yelling.

Will moved to do something, visibly pissed that someone was speaking that way toward Hannibal in particular, but Hannibal simply lifted a hand to indicate to him to stop. Will listened, though he didn't seem happy about it. The ranting went on, and when the man wasn't given a response, he huffed and walked away.

The hospital was surrounded by a lush field, not particularly in an urban setting. There weren't many people around the specific area they were in to bear witness to the event, especially not with them having been walking to their car.

Abigail, following Hannibal's lead, tried not to make a fuss about it. She merely got into the back seat, put her seatbelt on, and waited.

Will did not have the same idea.

He got into the driver's seat, still just as livid as before.

"The fuck was that guy's problem?" he said, slamming the door shut beside him. "What, he sees a kid being able to get out of there and gets mad *about it? You can't even blame his time period, just because he's balding doesn't make him old. He had to be younger than us both. He–"*

Will paused suddenly, the anger melting from his face as he turned towards Hannibal. Abigail, confused, glanced into the rear view mirror, and she saw what Will saw.

Tears.

"Hannibal?" Will asked gently, far calmer now as he reached for Hannibal's hand. "Hey, what's wrong? He didn't hurt you, did he?"

Hannibal shook his head, removing his hand from Will's to wipe his eye. "No. I'm rather used to it, I'm afraid. I only wish Abigail did not have to see it…"

Will looked almost frozen in place, but Abigail knew. She knew just by looking at him, just by seeing his eyes.

Over the next five seconds, the concern filling his eyes melded into one of pure, unfathomable rage .

He was out of the car before Abigail could process his movement.

Abigail tried to turn in her seat to see out the back window, to get any idea as to what was going on. All she heard was the man from before, not too far away, yelling similar obscenities at Will for a few seconds.

And then she heard screaming.

Her eyes went wide and she looked to Hannibal, horrified. When she didn't get any sort of response to the situation, she looked at him through the rear view mirror.

Hannibal, as calm as ever, was wiping tears from his eyes. No more fell afterwards. He was completely and entirely fine.

And then he met her gaze through the mirror.

"Abigail, I want you to listen to me," he said, beckoning her full attention, even with the screaming in the background. "Whatever urges you were raised to follow, you will never *be shamed for them in our home. Do you understand?"*

Her blood filled with ice as she recognized the meaning of his words, but almost inexplicably, it just as quickly thawed.

She nodded silently.

They stayed that way for a few moments longer, until finally, the screaming subsided. Hannibal glanced out the window for a moment before opening the glove compartment and reaching inside, fetching what looked to be a pack of wet wipes, then opened the door and stepped out of the car.

The trunk opened after some time, and Abigail remained perfectly still. She pretended not to notice the all too familiar heavy scent of blood wafting in front behind her, just as she pretended not to hear the thud of a body and the soft crunch it made against the tarp that coated the trunk.

She knew those sounds well. She knew that scent even better.

When the two men returned, they'd switched positions, and Hannibal drove them home.

Abigail didn't bother asking what kind of meat Hannibal used in his breakfast-for-dinner sausages. She had a feeling that she already knew.

And she ate heartily.

Will was already well on his way home from Quantico when he heard his phone ringing. Glancing at the caller ID, he sighed, picking it up and flipping it out to answer.

"Hey."

"Dad," Abigail said on the other end of the line, her voice tense. "I think someone followed me home."

Will's blood ran cold.

"Where are you?"

"I'm at your house, I swear this guy followed me. He's been stalking me for weeks, I thought I'd be able to take care of it eventually, or maybe mom would–"

He tensed. As dire as the situation seemed, he was rather distracted by her word choice.

"Mom".

There were exactly two people on this Earth allowed to refer to Hannibal with such terms, and those people were Will and Abigail. Only they fully comprehended him, and as a result, only they fully comprehended the complexity of his relationship with his past.

Years ago, Hannibal would never have fathomed being associated with a term like “mother”. The very notion made his skin crawl, for it would be associated with several assumptions about him that he wouldn’t dare allow anyone to make. Nowadays, there wasn’t anyone who would associate him with the concept of womanhood, and as a result, he found himself able to enjoy that which was so difficult to enjoy years ago. Broaden his horizons, as it were.

Will could remember sitting in their shared home, working on something while Abigail entered the room to ask him a question, and her being met with a very simple “Go ask your mother.” It was a term specifically associated with their brand of domestic life. “Mother” implied their closeness, while “father” was reserved for those outside of their family.

That was why Will hadn’t referred to him as Abigail’s mother in years.

He shook his head, snapping back into reality, realizing he’d been silent for far too long. He hadn’t even heard the rest of what she had said.

“I’m on my way,” he said at last. “Stay inside, keep the dogs with you. You’ll be alright, Abigail. I’m almost home.”

I’m almost home.

It was instinctive, reassuring her the way he would years ago. He hadn’t known her to be someone who was in danger since then, considering who she lived with most of the time.

Considering what she herself was capable of.

He was half an hour away, but ignoring traffic laws in areas where nobody was there, he was twenty minutes away.

He didn't pull into the driveway. No, he parked a good ways away, about a hundred yards out, getting out of the car and beginning his trek.

Abigail had mentioned that this was someone who'd been stalking her for a while. Something burned within him, the remnants of his old protective sense for his old family. She was certainly not obligated to tell him about it, not with the distance between them, but the idea of this happening to his daughter while not knowing about it…

He practically snarled to himself. She knew. She knew what she was doing. She knew what she could stir in him, that ferocious protector she'd come to know as her father.

She was just like *him,* after all.

While he would love to continue dwelling on the concept of whatever plan those two were cooking up in the place he used to call home, his mind stopped altogether when he saw the outline of a figure in the bushes.

Still about fifty yards from his house, but this jackass had binoculars.

As silent as he could be, Will came up behind him.

Whatever nonsense the man spewed was swiftly cut off when Will wrenched the binoculars from his grip, slamming them repeatedly onto the man's mouth until they would be pulled back with strings of blood and saliva, a tooth now lodged in the rubber.

It was seeing the face of the creep that did it for him. The face of the man stalking his *daughter* .

He sent the man to the ground with a harsh shove, causing the man's head to smack off of a tree trunk. Before the man could move, Will's boot came down upon the man's neck with a

harsh *crunch* , snapping the vertebrae between where the tree trunk met the grass.

The man lay on the ground, twitching pathetically as his nervous system desperately tried to come back online. It wouldn't, not ever again, even without the actions Will would take next. Will huffed at the sight, beginning his trek back to the house.

Abigail stepped outside only after Will was in sight, careful not to let the dogs run out. She ran to him, looking panicked at first. Her eyes met the blood on his hands, and she calmed unnervingly easily.

"Did you kill him?" she asked.

"No," he said. "You still got the tarp in your trunk?"

"Always," she said with a grin.

"Good. Head into the barn, get me my hatchet."

Abigail blinked, tilting her head, observing him. He wanted to glare at her for it. She was giving him the same damn look her mot–...her *father* would give him.

"You said you didn't kill him," she said. The implication went unsaid.

You're suggesting we dismember him while he's still alive.

Will said nothing, scowling at the treeline in the distance where the twitching body of his daughter's stalker lay.

"Just get the hatchet," he muttered, walking back to the body.

It was well past dusk when she returned home, setting her keys in the little dish by the door as she took her vest off, hanging it up.

She would've stayed with her father for the full weekend, but their hunt cut things short. Not that she minded, judging by the grin that was still plastered on her face as it was for the entire drive home.

"I can't tell whether I should accuse you of being early or late."

Abigail turned, peering into the living room. Her mother was sitting in his usual seat, though around this time of day, it was usually reserved for when he was contemplating something.

The conversation was not about to go well, that much Abigail knew.

"Weekend got cut short," Abigail said, leaning against the living room entrance.

"By what, exactly?"

Her jaw set, much in the way her father's would. They both knew very well that Hannibal could smell blood on her, could smell chemicals on her. She gazed at him, her eyes gradually turning cold and challenging.

"We went hunting," she said curtly.

Silence fell between them for a moment.

“Did you bring home the body?”

“He’s dissolving in a container in the trunk,” Abigail said.

Hannibal’s lip quirked for a split second before he could school his expression. Will was going rather out of his way to ruin a potential meal. Just like him, the spiteful thing. It was almost joyful to think about, being so embedded in Will’s mind that even the disposal of a body that had nothing to do with Hannibal was shrouded in petty vengeance.

“May I ask,” Hannibal said, at long last dipping into the tension in the room, “if your kill was, perhaps, the man from your school you had already planned to hunt?”

Abigail stared at him silently. Her face would be emotionless were it not for the dare in her eyes. The dare for him to start this conversation.

Hannibal was not one to back down from challenges, and Abigail would do very well to know that.

“You had plans,” Hannibal went on. “When, may I ask, did these plans change to include your father?”

“Today,” she answered. “I changed plans today.”

“After the case.”

“After you called me,” she clarified. It wasn’t much of a difference, really, but it led to one specific detail.

“After I told you how my time with him went,” Hannibal said, his voice dangerously quiet.

Abigail didn’t respond. They both knew it was the reason.

“Do you think of your father as being so foolishly stupid that he would not pick up on your intentions?” Hannibal asked, his tone growing sterner than he ever was with her. “Do you think he does not realize that you wanted to see him kill again? To kill with you again? Did you expect him to believe that this would have nothing to do with us as a whole?”

“I fixed your mistake,” Abigail spat.

“And what mistake, may I ask, did I make?”

“You had him,” she hissed. “You had him *right* . *There* . He was back in his element. You were supposed to be *working* with him while he went through everything, but no, you can’t have a single conversation with him without pissing him off. You’re fucking incapable of it, and then *I* have to deal with it.”

"You have your own interactions with him. If you crave so desperately to return to manipulating him, that is for you to do on your own. You do not need to drag me beneath the proverbial bus to accomplish that goal."

"You were supposed to fix this!" she screamed back. "I shouldn't be left to do this on my own! You were supposed to get him back! You told me I just needed to be patient, and this is what I get! A weekend every month where he looks at me like he hates me because I remind him of *you* !"

Silence fell between them, Abigail's red face becoming littered with fallen tears. Hannibal gazed at her, his eyes tense with pain.

"He believes you are a manipulator," he said after a minute passed. "If we are to mend what's been broken, you cannot prove him right."

"You told me to be patient," Abigail sobbed. "I've *been* patient. I fucking hate you."

She stormed out of the room then, her shoes scuffing against the stairs as she went to her room.

Hannibal didn't so much as move as she went, not even his eyes following her path.

He was not the sort of person to be riddled with regret, but he could feel responsibility. He was responsible for Abigail, and he'd been responsible for their family. Four years ago, he had promised Abigail a better life. A better world. He had held her sobbing face with strong hands that promised to keep her afloat.

She was drowning now.

He only wished that she wouldn't underestimate her father's wrath, because that was exactly the mistake Hannibal had made. He wouldn't be able to take seeing the pain she would be in if she suffered the same horrible looks he received from Will.

He moved at last, heading into his study.

He imagined he wouldn't sleep much that night anyway.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Hannibal falls into the past, and plans for the future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He couldn't remember the last time he wasn't able to concentrate on what he was reading.

He was not a man of many distractions at all, much less anything that could pry his mind away from any of his favorites in his vast collection of literature. And yet, the events of the day hung heavy in his chest, weighing down every passion he had until he was pulled into the depths of his own petty despair.

He drowned, now, too.

He set the book aside, sighing, rising from his seat to approach the desk in the room, hoping without any hope at all to find something, *anything* to distract himself.

He hoped to no avail. The mental cycle of events repeated, as it did three years ago for months on end, until he was no longer in his study at all, but standing in his kitchen.

The gentle sound of the flames licking away at wood in his fireplace crescendoed until his ears rang with the echoes of anger off of his kitchen walls.

And he stood upright, just as he did back then, taking it on the chin.

"You called him," Will spat at him. "You fucking *called* him."

Will's voice was laced with the hideous fury and pain he'd held for the past month, an underground volcano that finally saw the plates shift until it could spew out its deadly contents to the sky above.

Hannibal hadn't known when he was going to blow, but after the first week of Will not saying a word about what he'd discovered, Hannibal knew that Will's reckoning would be explosive indeed. Will had long stopped being the sort to hold anything back from Hannibal, which aided in the happiest year of their lives. And yet there he had been, seething quietly with clear disgust, and Hannibal himself wasn't even sure what Will had found.

Little had he known, Will's retribution would be divine.

"I should've known when I found that fucking trainee," Will shouted across the kitchen island, pacing back and forth like an agitated predator not knowing which angle was best to strike at. "I should've known you were capable of some shit like this."

"Will–"

" *Shut up!* "

Then, and only then, was the one time in Hannibal's entire time of knowing Will that he *flinched* .

Hannibal had had Will's anger directed at him before. It had seemed so long ago then, that snarky man on the Hobbs case who Alana said could use some help. He had seen Will's anger directed at others, passionate in his righteous fury, violent and beautiful.

This was neither of those things. This was unbridled hatred and disgust.

Will, no matter how furious, had always allowed Hannibal to speak. Hannibal had *never* , in their entire acquaintance, friendship, nor marriage, known Will to tell him to shut up before. It made something in his gut tingle the wrong way, as though his very nerves, no, his very organs were aware that something was deeply wrong.

"You called him," Will hissed, finally beginning to (very temporarily) quiet down, "because you just wanted to see what would happen, didn't you? *Didn't you* ? Because that's how you are with *everyone* ! Like a child breaking their toys to see what's on the inside! Like a spoiled. Fucking. *Child* !"

"Darling…"

Will glared at him, and Hannibal became quickly aware that he truly had no idea what he'd even wanted to say. At that point, he just wanted Will to stop yelling, to stop spouting such vile things his way.

Like a child indeed.

Will threw his hands out to each side, raising his brows mockingly, a silent demand to know what was so important that Hannibal needed to pipe up.

He took a breath.

"Look at what we have," Hannibal began, forcing his voice to remain gentle, far more composed than how he felt. "We would not have Abigail if it weren't for–"

"If it weren't for you almost getting her fucking *killed* ," Will spat, jamming a finger into the air with such force that, even from five feet away, Hannibal felt as though it was stabbing into his chest. "If it weren't for you *orphaning* her."

"As I recall, it was *you* who orphaned her."

Silence.

The moment the words left his mouth, he wished he could somehow find a way to reverse time, to take them back. Better yet, to prevent Will's discovery of Miriam Lass altogether, and thus prevent his subtle directing in conversation towards their new life's beginnings, and prevent Abigail's slip up with mentioning a call.

For once, he wished with all his might that he could keep Will ignorant. He didn't recall ever feeling that way before, but he would wish it, he would wish it if it meant he could keep him.

He truly was the man Will already thought he was.

Will's eyes had lost their fire, now downcast as his hands gripped the edge of the island. Hannibal could feel his heart physically flutter in its agony at the sight. Will was gripping the counter the same way he would in the mornings after a nightmare, covered in sweat and knowing he would find Hannibal in the kitchen. Seeking him.

Will wasn't seeking him anymore.

The silence only grew increasingly unbearable, until Will finally got the courage to speak again.

"You didn't tell me you had any other properties, Hannibal," Will said, his voice wrecked with the aftermath of screaming and the harsh current of pain. "How long has she been there?"

Hannibal closed his eyes, allowing himself a moment to grieve Will's loss of ignorance, before opening them and responding.

"Three months tomorrow," he answered honestly.

“Three months,” Will repeated, turning away and swiping a hand down his mouth and jaw, nearly cutting himself off at the end in disbelief. “Three months…You’ve kept an FBI trainee hostage for three fucking months.”

“I was–”

“What? You were what? What were you planning with her? Were you really so spiteful that Jack was doing his *job* that you took it out on some young woman he sent in? Did you think I wouldn’t find out? Did you even consider what sort of ramifications that could have on *my* career if you’re caught? And that’s not– I don’t even want to *know* what you’ve been doing to her.”

“I’ve done nothing,” Hannibal quickly defended. “You are correct in her innocence. She should never have been sent in, and she is not the one to blame for that. She is completely unharmed.”

“And when do you plan on letting her go?”

The question was pointed, fast, Will’s eyes boring directly into Hannibal’s with indignance.

Because he knew that Hannibal had no answer for him.

Even so, being hit with nothing took the wind right out of Will’s sails, leaving his shoulders drooped and his posture reverting back to his stressed slouch. He took his glasses off, rubbing at his face underneath.

And despite being the cause of his pain, Hannibal wanted nothing more than to console him. Perhaps it was true after all that people want things more when they are forbidden.

“I can’t do this,” Will said at last, his eyes still not lifting up from his hand. “I just…I can’t do this.”

“You need not have any involvement at all,” Hannibal replied, keeping his tone gentle, consoling, anything to avoid sending Will on another tirade. “You know Abigail is your daughter. You know I can handle the rest.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Will said, finally removing his hand but still not meeting Hannibal’s gaze, nor lifting his eyes at all. “Everything is just…I thought I knew what you were capable of.”

Hannibal’s brows knit as he looked at Will, his entire being filling with sudden, horrible confusion. Will *did* know what he was capable of, Will knew him better than anyone on the planet possibly could. What did he mean?

“And she knows, doesn’t she?” Will asked, and only then did he look up at Hannibal, nodding sardonically along with his own words. “She knows. She knows what you did, and she knows how to *play house* . Be the sweet little daughter no matter what monsters she’s with.”

“Will–”

“I can’t do this anymore, Hannibal,” Will said, shaking his head as his eyes brimmed with tears. “You made me genuinely believe that we were in everything together. The reality is I’ve been tied in your net, and I can’t live like that.”

Hannibal’s eyes grazed over him, wide and tense now.

“Will,” he said, to urge him to clarify, and to plead for him not to.

“I can’t live like this,” Will repeated.

And as despair settled deep within his ribcage, clawing at his heart and lungs, the scenery changed altogether.

He was in his usual chair, one leg crossed over the other, staring off at nothing. A hand, with his elbow on the armrest, seemed to be in front of his face for a more important gesture of some kind. Really, it was there as a sort of shield.

Abigail stood behind him, her hand coming down to grip his shoulder. He dropped his hand then, bringing the other hand up to hold onto hers.

He was silently, unsuccessfully, blinking away his tears. She seemed worse off.

“You can’t just let him go,” Abigail begged, staring out the window at her father, who had just grabbed the last of his things (No he had not. There were plenty of items in this house, picked with both of the men, or all three of them together, in mind. They were as much his as anything else. Would he be coming back for them?) to pack away into his car. “Please, go talk to him, stop him, he can’t– He can’t just go. You can’t let him *go* !”

“It will only be for a while, Abigail,” he assured her through tears. “You know how slow his anger is to cool. We must be patient for him. He needs his space to think everything through. He will be back, Abigail.”

“He will be back”, you promised her.

It was just beginning to rain when he pulled into the driveway. A faint drizzle when he got out of the car, clear plastic containers in hand. He glanced to the sky, trying to spot where the sun was hidden away, but to no avail. He imagined the rain would increase soon with how dark the sky was.

He began to make his way to the front door, but before he’d made it so much as five steps, the door opened.

Dogs came swarming out, joyous and excited after a week without seeing the other man they'd come to know so dear. He smiled, reaching down to pet who he could. Admittedly, the house had been very quiet without them. Empty, even.

The main subject of the home's emptiness stepped onto the porch, having clearly gotten dressed as quickly as he could.

His eyes were cold, filled with nothing but disgust and contempt.

"Hello, Will–"

"Why the fuck are you here, Hannibal?"

Hannibal blinked, admittedly taken aback. "Lunch, I was hoping. It's been some time, I had hoped we could–"

"Either you didn't receive the papers or you're trying to play dumb."

Hannibal's jaw twitched, unsure whether to close or remain open in his hurt shock.

"...I received them," he said at last, far quieter than he spoke before. "Do you expect me to sign them?"

"What do you think I sent them for?"

"Will, it's been a week. I can't imagine how tired you must be. Please, let us–"

“Why? Too tired to make any decisions for myself? Tired because I’m back to my shitty little cot instead of your *elegant* bed? Tired and hungry because I’m feeding myself instead of letting you do it? I can survive just fine on my own.”

Hannibal’s gaze softened, his body unmistakably becoming a bit more slack. His pain was evident in every part of him.

“...I am not signing those papers, Will.”

I won’t even touch those disgusting things. I won’t insult myself by letting you go.

I won’t throw away the best thing in my life with a piece of paper.

Will stiffened, and yet even so, he didn’t appear shocked at all. He knew of his husband’s possessive nature by heart, just as Hannibal knew of Will’s. Something within him, likely a large part, had to have known that Hannibal would never sign. Sending the papers to begin with was most likely just wishful thinking.

Or to prove a point. That would be very *Will* .

As if in compromise, Will’s shoulders slackened once more, and he gave a shrug as his expression shifted with the motion.

“Sign them or don’t sign them, it doesn’t change anything.”

“Doesn’t it?”

“No, it doesn’t. I may be stuck being legally binded to you, but I’m not coming back. I’m not willfully tangling myself in your net anymore. You can take your little bits of free range rude back into your car and *fuck off* .”

And he beckoned the dogs' return, leaving Hannibal to watch as the greater portion of his family swept back into the old white house, and the front door was slammed shut.

He got back into his car, setting aside the almost forgotten lunch he'd packed for the both of them. He gazed at the containers for far longer than he should have, the rain outside crescendoing into something deafening.

More undignified than he'd ever felt in his life, his arms folded over his steering wheel, and he wept.

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"Mom?"

Hannibal's eyes snapped open, his mind ripped out of its poisoned reverie.

"Yes?" he responded, turning at last towards the doorway Abigail stood in.

Abigail seemed uncertain, guilty even, her hand resting on the doorway. She swallowed, stepping in at last and marching directly up to him, wrapping her arms around him without preamble.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't…This isn't your fault. I shouldn't have said any of that to you…"

“Abigail,” Hannibal began, wrapping his arms around her in return, cradling her head with his hand. “As much as your apology is appreciated, it is far from necessary. I can only expect you to handle so much before the dam breaks.”

“Still…you didn’t deserve that.”

“Perhaps I did,” Hannibal countered. “You’ve been expected to shoulder unimaginable burdens. You’re still very young, Abigail, whether you like to admit it or not. You are more than entitled to your frustration. As much as I wish things could have gone smoother, I couldn’t have expected them to.”

Abigail pulled away then, just far back enough to be able to tilt her head up and look him in the eye. “You’re sure you’re not upset?”

Hannibal gave her a fond smile then, bringing his hand to cup her face. “I will never lie to you, Abigail. Upset cannot even begin to describe it. But that is caused by more than just your words, and I cannot put any blame on you. You are our daughter, Abigail, not our marriage counselor. That burden should never even remotely feel as though it has been placed upon you.”

Abigail smiled back, and she shook her head. “I don’t feel like that. I promise I don’t. I just feel…responsibility, in some way, I guess. You’re both my family, and parents or not, I have to take care of you just as much as you take care of me. I’m young, but I’m not a child. Don’t your beloved traditional family values suggest that I *should* take care of you at some point?”

Hannibal smiled bigger, unable to keep from being amused. “Too soon, Abigail. Far too soon.”

“I don’t know, you’re already grey…”

“Don’t push it.”

She laughed then, finally pulling away and moving towards the door. “I just didn’t want to go to bed without saying anything…You sure we’re good?”

“Perfectly fine, Abigail. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, mom.”

And she left then, leaving him with the unsteady aftermath of Will’s divine wrath channeled into his own mind.

Three days. Three days of virtual radio silence. From Will, from the case, from everything.

Hannibal could understand nobody desiring to increase the pressure in the room. He could understand the discomfort at the tension, the no doubt existing side glances between passerby and bystanders, all waiting for the tension to snap.

What he could *not* understand was being ignored, nor would he allow it.

That was why, after Abigail had left for her evening classes, the head of the behavioral science unit was seated across from him at his table.

Jack, however he had felt about the tension in the room before, seemed perfectly content to be seated at Hannibal’s table now.

“Tell me, Dr. Graham, what am I about to put in my mouth?”

“That would be rabbit,” Hannibal swiftly lied, smiling politely.

“Looks like he should’ve hopped faster,” Jack joked.

Hannibal laughed, a genuine sound, unable to help himself. “Yes, he should have,” he agreed.

Dinner carried on without a shred of tension in sight, Jack easily able to dish out information on his home life, his wife, their usual meals…

“And god, I couldn’t even think about trying to get a full meal together after yesterday. Nearly twenty minutes of back and forth about whether or not he should take a medical leave…”

Hannibal perked up then, though it was far from a good thing. “He?”

Jack, his fork held in mid air, sighed, allowing it to drop back to the plate.

“I wasn’t sure if he would’ve told you or not,” Jack said.

“I haven’t heard a thing since last you and I spoke,” Hannibal replied.

Jack breathed out, deep and even, a decision made in his head.

“Should’ve known he’d put things together quickly, he always does,” Jack went on. “Ended up spotting one of the kids behind a house before we all got there. He got very lucky, bullet just barely grazed his shoulder. I suggested he take some leave, he refused.” He looked at Hannibal then, as though uncertain, but pressed onward. “I wasn’t sure he could handle coming back, given…everything.”

Hannibal set his own utensils down, hands folding on the table in front of him. “I must ask, Jack. Did things turn silent to avoid increasing tension?”

“I’m sorry, Dr. Graham,” Jack said, shaking his head. “I wouldn’t usually hang you out to dry like that. But Will gets too deep in his own head as it is on these cases, I just didn’t know if I would end up exacerbating anything by bringing you back in. I didn’t want to insult you in any way, but…quite frankly, I didn’t know what the hell move to make. I hope you can forgive me for that.”

Hannibal tipped his head slightly in acknowledgement. “Far be it from me to refuse forgiveness to someone who was looking out for my husband’s well-being.”

Jack smiled then, seeming to believe the situation resolved.

“However…”

And Jack frowned. “However?”

Hannibal’s brow furrowed as his eyes cast downward, the perfect amount of hesitation written on his face to be believable. He met Jack’s eyes once more, wetting his lips with his tongue.

“I told you, when we spoke on that day, that I was plenty aware of what Will does on these cases.”

Jack nodded, urging him onward.

“I am…equally aware, then, of the toll it takes on him,” Hannibal continued. “Work experience does not prevent these killers from burrowing into his mind, putting him at complete unease. He’s left lost at sea, and without a paddle, they’ll overturn his boat

altogether. I know my husband, Jack. Nothing shakes him quite like the idea of these killers overturning his boat."

Jack's expression grew taut as Hannibal went on, taking his words in with grave seriousness. He thought for a moment after Hannibal finished, before finally speaking again.

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

"I do not expect to be involved in every aspect of every case, I am not FBI personnel. That being said…the thought of him dealing with these killers in the dark, alone and afraid–" he swallowed roughly. "As complicated as things may be between us, I cannot bear the thought, Jack. Perhaps I am being selfish by asking you to sacrifice your comfort to deal with whatever anger this may spark in him, but I am asking you to allow me to accompany him. I would prefer seeing him angry over seeing him lost, confused, afraid, and–"

His lip quivered and his hand came up in attempt to still it, or cover it entirely. He blinked away the tears that welled in his eyes, looking away as though in shame.

Jack leaned forward then, lowering his voice to the tune of the gravity of the situation.

"Nothing's gonna happen to him," he assured. "You're a professional just as much as he is. I asked you to consult for a very real reason, Dr. Graham. You're more than welcome aboard. I'd rather whatever squabbling ensues than to see something happen that could've been avoided."

Hannibal took a deep breath, as if needing to steady himself, and exhaled, pulling his handkerchief from his pocket to dab at his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, his voice just barely trembling.

"Don't thank me," Jack replied. "You'd do the same, wouldn't you?"

Dinner went on without much fuss, though Hannibal did manage to lighten the mood by apologizing for his “outburst”, causing Jack to laugh at his definition of an outburst. An allyship was crafted, a single string looped around the arm of one of the strongest marionettes at Hannibal’s disposal.

He had warned Abigail against attempting to manipulate her father, but he’d made no mention of anyone else.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal having the manipulation skills of a 1950s housewife is something that can be so personal to me

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